Johnson Home, Office Cost U.S. $5.1 Million

By Richard L. Lyons 10/11/73
Washington Post Staff Writer

Rep. John Buchanan (R-Ala.) said yesterday that public funds spent on security and office space at the late President Lyndon B. Johnson's Texas ranch were comparable to funds spent at President Nixon's properties, considering that Mr. Nixon has two private residences.

Buchanan produced new figures totaling $5.1 million spent on President Johnson's property as a House subcommittee of which he is the senior Republican member opened hearings on the propriety of the $10.1 million the government says it spent at Mr. Nixon's homes at Key Biscayne and San Clemente.

Buchanan said the subcommittee Tuesday received from the General Services Administration a detailed accounting of $1,661,002.89 GSA spent during the Johnson presidenty making the LBJ Ranch secure and providing office space for Johnson in Austin. The bulk of this figure was $1,059,151.93 spent to build and maintain an office suite for Johnson in a federal building at Austin.

In addition, Buchanan said other official sources told him that $3.5 million was spent by the military on communications at the ranch so that Johnson in his capacity as commander-in-chief of the armed forces would be in constant touch with all parts of the world.

Figures previously released by the government on public funds spent on Mr. Nixon's properties show $3.6 million spent by GSA. This broke down into $1.7 million spent for an office complex on Coast Guard property at San Clemente, $703,367 spent on Mr. Nixon's property at San Clemente and $1,180,522 spent at Key Biscayne. In addition, $5.7 million was spent by the Department of Defense on communications, $214,161 by the Secret Service and $544,000 by the Department of Transportation.

GSA spending at the Johnson ranch included items such as $18,000 to modify a communications building, $12,709 to install wiring for lighting in the hangar by the air strip (which Johnson built while a member of Congress), $7,225 to air-condition the hangar, $6,723 to light the perimeter of the ranch, $336 for a desk for the President's military aide, $14 for an ice chest for the Secret Service and $15 for a sign reading "keep out."

Rep. Jack Brooks (D-Tex.), subcommittee chairman, said the purpose of the hearings is to determine whether federal agencies are fulfilling their obligations to protect the President in an "efficient and economical manner." He said use of public funds to purchase such items as den furniture, a heating system and a sewer line at Mr. Nixon's property "obviously raise questions in the public mind."

The government is required by law to provide security items for a President's private home upon request of the Secret Service. Rep. John Culver (D-Iowa) raised the quesion of whether friends of Mr. Nixon had pressured the Secret Service to request public installation of items that were more a prvate convenience than a security necessity. One such item was a $388 exhaust fan for a Sunday fireplace in the San Clemente den.

Culver read a memo written by a secretary to Herbert Kalmback, Mr. Nixon's private attorney, to a contractor who had installed the fan and sent the bill to Kalmbach. The memo said that Kenneth Iacovoni, Secret Service agent in charge at San Clemente, had "finally agreed" that the fan should be charged to the government as a security item. Iacovoni told the subcommittee he had no recollection of any such conversation.

James J. Rowely, director of the Secret Service, traced the development of communications systems at Presidents' homes from a few phone jacks on poles around Franklin D. Roosevelt's Hyde Park estate to the sophisticated and expensive devices used today. General Accounting Office officials appeared but had not completed their report on public funds spent on presidential homes back to FDR.